

Dear Friends,

Earlier this week I had the pleasure of participating in the 2008 Carolina First Palmetto Finest Awards ceremony. The excitement that filled the Koger Center and surrounded this event was awesome – the atmosphere reminiscent of my coaching days. But the focus wasn't on athletics. More than 1,500 teachers, school supporters, and educator leaders were in attendance to show their support for academics achievement.

In its 30th year, the Carolina First Palmetto's Finest Award is one of the most coveted and respected awards among educators. Schools are judged on student achievement, faculty training, program goals and teaching quality, office practices, and community involvement. Awards are presented each year to two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school which offer the best in innovative, effective educational programs.

Sponsors are Carolina First Bank and the South Carolina Association of School Administrators. Other partners for the 2008 awards include Promethean, Inc., which will give an electronic classroom outfit to each of the four winning schools, and Data Recognition Corporation, sponsors of a leadership reception.

Emerging as winners Monday night were: Aiken Elementary School in Aiken County, Lake Carolina Elementary in Richland School District Two; Riverside Middle School in Anderson School District Four, and Waccamaw High School in Georgetown County. The other nominees were Buffalo Elementary in Union County, Killian Elementary in Richland School District Two, McDonald Elementary in Georgetown County, Pate Elementary in Darlington County, Lugoff-Elgin Middle in Kershaw County, Central High School in Chesterfield County, Greenville Technical Charter in Greenville County, and Wren High School in Anderson School District One.

In its application, Waccamaw High School in Georgetown noted that it lives by the premise: "Good is not good enough." I believe that philosophy is a guiding principle for each of these winners. Excellence is the standard, and everyone works together to achieve that goal. Their practices are models of innovation for our state and the nation.

I salute these Palmetto Finest winners and runners-up. Individually and collectively they demonstrate that South Carolina does have schools that are second to none, and that if educators, students, and communities work hard, we can produce the consistently excellent results we all want, need, and deserve.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education